

GOV. WOODBRIDGE'S

A D D R E S S

BEFORE

THE NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY

OF MICHIGAN,

DELIVERED DECEMBER 22, 1847.

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Detroit:

PRINTED BY HASKIN & WILLCOX.

1849.



# AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY OF MICHIGAN,

DECEMBER 22, 1847.

BY HON. WILLIAM WOODBRIDGE.

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PRINTED BY HARSHA & WILLCOX, No. 50, JEFFERSON AVENUE.

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NOTE.—The Executive Committee of the New England Society of Michigan, being instructed by the society to request of Gov. Woodbridge a copy of his Address delivered before them, for publication, received in reply to the note which they addressed him, the copy requested, with the following letter:

Springwells, near Detroit, January 6, 1849.

To Messrs. J. M. Howard, E. Farnsworth, W. A. Raymond, John Chester and  
W. A. Bacon, Ex. Com. &c. &c.

GENTLEMEN, Your note of the date of the 26th ult., requesting a copy of the address which I delivered at the anniversary meeting of the "New England" Society in Dec. 1847, has been received: and in pursuance of the request contained in it, I have the honour herewith to transmit it. A slight examination of the manuscript, will show, that it falls entirely short of the plan indicated in it; leaving untouched many topics, a review of which, was manifestly contemplated, but which could not have been accomplished, without making the address *offensively* long. This imperfection was sought, in part, to be remedied, in an address subsequently delivered before the "Detroit Young men's" Society. And the fact is alluded to here, in the hope, that an apology may be found in it, for the manifest *incompleteness* of the manuscript now transmitted.

Be pleased Gentlemen, to accept for yourselves, my acknowledgments for the courteous terms in which you have been pleased to make known to me the wishes of the Society:—and believe me to be

Very respectfully

Your obedient servant,

WILLIAM WOODBRIDGE.

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Francis. July 11/2

## ADDRESS.

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GENTLEMEN OF THE "NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY."

A stranger to the details of our early history would be very naturally tempted to inquire, *why* such an association as this, has been formed? If it be to celebrate the landing of a small band of adventurers, upon the cold and cheerless shores of New England, some two hundred years or more ago; why thus distinguish the event from other migrations of more recent times? was it that in character, in purposes, or in circumstances, they were so unlike? what *manner* of men then *were* they whose arrival on a newly discovered continent, we would thus commemorate? what was there, peculiar, in the circumstances out of which, their expedition grew? and *what* very extraordinary consequences, have resulted from their bold and perilous adventure?

These, Gentlemen, are questions, a *stranger* may well put; but which the occasion does not require me here to dwell upon. I am addressing *sons* of New England: I am addressing those, who are familiar with the prolific story of the "Pilgrim Fathers!" Those who have heard of the exemplary piety of those dauntless christians; and of their high intellectual and moral worth: who have learned something of their character, of their purposes; of the wrongs practised upon them; of their perils and sufferings; and of their indomitable courage. The copious annals of New England, to which I must presume you have had access; will have informed you of their history in graphic detail; and of the subsequent and eventful story of their true hearted descendents; down to the period, when the relations that bound them to the mother country were merged, dissolved, lost forever, in blood! You will not expect nor desire, that in the brief remarks, to which the propriety of the occasion seems to limit me, I should place in review before you many details illustrative of the topics, to which those

questions point; nor attempt to group together, in a connected series, even all those leading events, which mark the trials, the struggles and the progress, of the early Colonists of our "Father-Land!"

But there *are* circumstances, having relation to the general subject, which from their peculiarity, although known, may yet bear repetition: and there are incidents too, scattered here and there, upon the records of time, which, in so far as they may tend to display the character, and vindicate more fully the purposes, the principles, and the institutions of the Founders of New England; it may be profitable for us to contemplate, with renewed attention: for those purposes, principles and institutions, casting their influences into the future, have, in a great degree, given character to the actual condition of society among us; and impressed deeply upon the foundations of our onward destiny, bold lineaments of that well regulated political Freedom, all profess to admire. To some of these incidents and circumstances, I desire to advert: and propose to limit the few discursive remarks, which it may remain for me to make, to that, more humble purpose.

It was in the month of November 1620, that the May-Flower, with its care worn colonists, approached a part of the New Continent, then utterly unknown to them, and far north of their intended point of debarkation. From that intended point, the weather-beaten vessel, had been *intentionally* and widely diverted, as Historians assert, by the *treachery* and the *bribery* of the mercenary captain. The devoted pilgrims then saw before them, not the country which had been described to them; nor that which their imaginations had depicted; but the bleak, the unexplored, the repulsive and broken coasts of that which is New England now. Storms had arisen; the cold was piercing, the harbour was too shallow for their vessel to approach the shore; *all* were strangers to the inhospitable coast! It was not until the 22nd of December of the same year, that through fearful perils, and extreme suffering, they effected a landing upon that "Plymouth Rock," to which, all unconscious, their landing was destined, in aftertimes, to give so much celebrity! The event constitutes indeed, an *Epoch* which no future historian will pass over in silence: an epoch, which the philosophic statesman, will not fail to contemplate, when, as from a high eminence, he looks upon the *past*, and upon the present; and traces, far into the future, the workings of those moral and political causes,

which had their humble origin there ! An epoch, which *has* furnished, and will again and again furnish to the patriot, ample materials, for whatever is admonitory in the past, and cheering in the future : and for whatsoever is eloquent, and captivating, and powerful, in the oratory which he wields ! an epoch which the accomplished statuary has already signalized ; and which the painter has made the subject of the most unique and touching, and beautiful, of all the magnificent paintings, which Genius and Skill, have so appropriately adorned the panels of the national Capitol !

Influenced by the high consideration in which these Founders of New England are now, with one accord, and confessedly holden by *all* ; the inquisitive stranger, will seek to <sup>ascertain</sup> ~~enquire~~ some knowledge of their early history : His attention will be at once arrested by the disclosure of the smallness of their numbers, and the paucity of their means, when compared with the obstacles to be surmounted, and the great purposes they had in view. Historians inform us, that their whole number, comprehending men, women and children, did not exceed one hundred and one ; and that their means, aided by a fair, but moderate amount of wealth ; consisted, in their distinguished intelligence, and well balanced minds ; in their stoutness of heart, and firmness of purpose ; and in that trust in the protection of Providence, which had never before, in any exigency, deserted them ! The work before them, was to sit down, by the side of the wild and ferocious savages of that wilderness ; and by their purchased, or enforced consent, to found there, a distinct community, *a new Empire* ! So obviously inadequate to the end, will *such* numbers and such means, appear to him ; that he will *surely* be led to doubt of the *fidelity* of the annalist : He will *strongly* suspect, that *other* causes impelled them ! Did they, *indeed*, voluntarily leave the cultivated fields and the peaceful firesides of their Fathers, in order, with *such* numbers, and with *such* means, to give effect to a project so bold, so manifestly visionary ? were they not rather, *outcasts* from the society in which they were reared : and *exiled*, by the *Justice* of the violated Law ? or, were they of *disordered* intellects, wild enthusiasts, spurning the reasonable counsels of ordinary prudence : mere *monomaniacs* ? Posterity, Gentlemen, will *not* judge so harshly of them ! *Driven*, they may have been, from the country of their birth ; but, it was by the tyrannical oppressions, of the House

of Stuart! They came, *not* from the chambers of the guilty, nor from the redundant outpourings of the Poor House; nor yet, from the Lunatic Asylums of the mother country! But, emanating from the virtuous, and the most enlightened of the distracted community which they left; and where their sympathies still lingered; they came, to form a community of their own: They came that they might secure to themselves and to their posterity, the blessings of wise and happy institutions: They came, that they might lay, broad and deep the foundations of that enlightened, virtuous, and well ordered freedom, which they loved; or else, and if it should be so directed by the overruling Providence of the God whom they adored, that they might suffer, and die martyrs, in so holy a cause! It was in truth the *crowning* effort, of men, who *spurning* the arrogant dictation of the minions of an arbitrary monarch, had determined, having weighed *all* consequences, thus to remove themselves beyond the reach of a power, so intolerant; and of machinations so ignoble and debasing!

Nor did this small band of Pilgrims, stand so entirely alone, in the principles they avouched and in the resolutions they had formed, as may be imagined: The sympathies of the great body of their countrymen were with them: and there appears no doubt, but that thousands; speaking the same language, the descendants of a common ancestry, and standing by the same religious and political faith; had resolved to incur the same hazards, to submit to the same sacrifices, and to share the same destiny, that should await their brothers in the new world! If these promised co-adjutors, had been permitted to execute their settled purpose, and thus to have added so greatly to the moral and physical strength of the colonists, while in the very *crisis* of their affairs; who would have deemed their project, an idle fancy? or that its final success, was involved in so much doubt? But, their countrymen were *not permitted* to execute their purpose. Some relief indeed, had been extended to the colonists; and accessions to their numbers had been made, during the first and <sup>first</sup> ~~second~~ succeeding years, after their arrival. But these shipments were made, principally it is believed, in vessels sailing direct from Holland; or other parts of the continent, where many of their countrymen had found temporary refuge, preparatory to their final embarkation. In the mean time, the first Charles had succeeded to the throne of his father. It is not my

purpose to dwell upon the vices, or the foibles of this unhappy Prince: If they were numerous, or great; they were expiated upon the scaffold! But I may be permitted to say, that he was educated to believe, that *his* authority *was above the Law*, and absolute! That there was *no limit* to the power of the crown, but the *will* of the reigning monarch! That private property, personal liberty, the *opinions* even, of his people, were all subjects of *his* rightful control! He sought to rule without Parliaments: He sought to levy and collect taxes, by his own, unsanctioned authority: There *never* was a period perhaps, when the liberties of England, were in so imminent danger! At *such* a period; when nothing but debasing slavery, both political and religious, on the *one* hand; or, fearful revolutions, and a civil war of uncertain duration and of doubtful success, on the other; were pending over their ill-fated country; multitudes of its people, were seeking in voluntary exile, that quietude and freedom, which seemed forever denied to them at home. New settlements were formed in Massachusetts, in Connecticut, and elsewhere; and that of New Plymouth, greatly strengthened and increased: while every indication promised a rapid and a happy growth to them all! It was in this condition of things, that the capricious and infatuated monarch, pursuing the mad and fitful counsels of his demented advisers; expressly and without law, inhibited the further migration of his subjects to New England. Alluding to this pregnant fact, Hume, the eloquent historian, but the apologist of the House of Stuart, and the powerful advocate of arbitrary government; thus expresses himself: "The Puritans, restrained in England, shipped themselves off to America; and laid there the foundations of a government, which possessed all the liberty, both civil and religious, of which they found themselves bereaved in their native country. But their enemies, unwilling that they should *anywhere* enjoy ease and contentment, and dreading perhaps, the dangerous consequences of so disaffected a colony, prevailed on the King to issue a proclamation, debarring these devotees access, even into those inhospitable deserts. Eight ships, lying in the Thames, and ready to sail, were detained by order of the Council: and in *these*, were embarked, among others, Sir Arthur Hazelrig, John Hempden, John Pym, and Oliver Cromwell, who had resolved, forever to abandon their native country, and fly to the other extremity of the Globe; where they might enjoy

“Lectures and Discourses, of *any* length or form, which pleased them.” He then adds the very significant remark, that the “King had *afterwards full leisure to repent*, this exercise of his authority!” It constitutes no part of my purpose, Gentlemen, to detain you by elaborate comments upon the lives or qualities of these eminently great men: Yet some reference to them seems called for by the connection in which they are named by the historian; and especially by the character which they reflect, upon those companions whom they wished to join. What space they *would have occupied*, in the history of the times, if, with their numerous associates, they had not been thwarted in their peaceful and legitimate purpose, of uniting themselves, with their friends of the “Plymouth Rock,” may be left to conjecture: But that in their respective spheres, they afterwards, exerted a most *controlling* influence, in the affairs of the nation, at home, is abundantly established. Their associations had always been, with the Patriot Party. Being forcibly shut out, from that asylum in the new world they had sought; and being men of easy fortunes, they appear afterwards, to have devoted themselves, more exclusively to public affairs: and it is not unreasonable to suppose, that on their return to public life, they may have taken with them, more of bitterness against the court, by reason of their sense of the high handed injustice which had been practiced upon them. Of Mr. Pym, I think it may be truly said, that the sincerity of *his* professions, was never brought into doubt. Uniformly opposed to the high pretensions, and arbitrary measures of the court; English Liberty, had not, in those times of commotion and peril, a more constant, sagacious, and successful vindicator in Parliament, than John Pym. Immediately after his premeditated exile was prevented in the manner related; his name appears, associated with that constellation of great men, members of the House of Commons, who, in those troublous times, fashioned the course, and controlled the counsels of that House, in which was embodied, the concentrated and terrific power of the Commons of England. For many years, he continued there, faithful to the high trusts confided to him, a distinguished member. Neither the allurements of the court; nor fear of its vindictive power; nor the fitful and intemperate zeal, which occasionally marked the course of the Commons, could ever disarm his vigilance;

or despoil him of his patriotism, and of his cool calculating sagacity ! He was a man "of large discourse, looking before and after."

Of John Hampden, I do not know how to speak, lest on the one hand, I should fail to render that ample tribute of commendation to the history and character of so eminently great and good a man, which is so justly due ; or on the other, lest I should offend against your patience, and, unwittingly, draw too largely upon your indulgent attention. Seeking to avoid these difficulties on either hand ; I propose then, gentlemen, simply to solicit your consideration of a few comments, upon his course and character, made by the same eloquent historian, to whom I have already referred : being quite well aware, that even the *meager praise*, of a writer whose sympathies were so *notoriously* with the House of Stuart, when bestowed upon one of the most formidable opponents of its encroachments upon the public liberties, is intitled to *peculiar weight*. Mr. Hume says that "This year (1637, or some time after his intended voyage to New England, was so inconsiderately arrested :) "John Hampden acquired by his spirit "and courage, universal popularity, throughout the nation ; and has "merited great renown with posterity, for the bold stand which he "made, in defense of the laws and liberties of his country. After the "imposing of ship money, Charles, in order to discourage all opposition, had proposed this question to the Judges : "Whether in *case* of "*necessity*, for the defense of the Kingdom ; he might not impose this "taxation ; and whether *he* were not the *sole* judge of the necessity ?" "These *Guardians of law and liberty*, replied, with great *complaisance*, "that in case of *necessity*, he might impose that taxation ; and that *he* "was sole judge of the necessity." Hampden had been rated at twenty "shillings, for an estate which he possessed in Buckingham : yet notwithstanding this declared opinion of the Judges, notwithstanding the "great power, and sometimes rigorous maxims of the crown ; notwithstanding the small prospect of relief from Parliament ; he resolved, "rather than tamely submit to so illegal an imposition, to stand a legal "prosecution, and expose himself to all the indignation of the Court. "The case was argued during twelve days, in the Exchequer Chamber, "before all the Judges of England ; and the nation regarded with the "utmost anxiety, every circumstance of this celebrated trial. The "event was easily foreseen : but the principles and reasonings, and

“behaviour of the parties engaged in this trial, were much canvassed “and inquired into; and *nothing* could equal the favour paid to the “one side, except the hatred which attended the other.” The prejudiced Judges, four excepted, gave sentence in favour of the crown. But Hampden, (Mr Hume proceeds to say;) obtained by the trial, the “end for which he had so generously sacrificed his safety and his quiet: “the people were roused from their lethargy, and became sensible of “the danger to which their liberties were exposed, &c.” (3. Hume 414. 416.) In the civil war which afterwards ensued, Hampden was wounded in battle; and died of his wound. Hume thus sums up his character: “Many were the virtues and talents of this eminent personage; and his valour during the war, had shown out with a lustre “equal to that of the other accomplishments, by which he had been “distinguished. Affability in conversation; temper, art and eloquence “in debate; penetration and discernment in counsel; industry, vigilance and enterprise in action; all these praises are unanimously “ascribed to him, by Historians of the most opposite parties. His “virtues too and integrity, in all the duties of private life, are allowed to have been beyond exception; *but we must only be cautious “notwithstanding his generous zeal for liberty, not hastily to ascribe to “him, the praises of a good Citizen.*” Thus, and with this insidious caution to his readers, Mr. Hume sums up the merits and character of this high spirited and devoted Patriot!

The history of Oliver Cromwell, is written in characters too broad, and deep, and is too well known, to justify, at my hands, more than a passing remark. The faculties, and the qualities of men, are, sometimes of early, perhaps precocious growth: Sometimes, they come more tardily to maturity: and in many cases, probably, remain in *rest* or dormant, until, with their unconscious possessor, they pass, *never fully disclosed*, to the grave! Man, whether viewed individually, or in communities, seems, under the Providence of God, *wonderfully the creature of circumstance*. Great crises, in the affairs of men, or of nations, stimulate, strengthen, seem to *create*, great faculties, and great qualities, suitable to, and commensurate with the occasion! Thus, the great events of our own Revolution, acting powerfully upon the *mind* and the *heart*, of the whole country, elicited, and brought into vigorous action, a degree and a variety of ability, and of talent, moral

and intellectual, which in no age or country, have ever been surpassed; and which, but for the crisis which produced them, would never have been exhibited to our admiration! The correctness of this vein of thought, is I think plainly demonstrated in the life and history of Oliver Cromwell. He had been a member of the House of Commons eight or ten years, before his intended embarkation for America. In all that period, he had acquired little or no distinction: He is spoken of indeed by historians, as being then, a man "*of no account!*" The extraordinary faculties he possessed, and of which he was himself probably long unconscious; do not seem to have been fully developed, until the very foundations of the monarchy, had been broken up; and the nation, hurried into all the horrors of civil war!

Whether he were ever sincere, in his habitual and lofty pretensions of sanctity, and devotedness to the <sup>course</sup> of free government, has, I am aware, long ago, been brought into doubt. Having no very fixed opinion on that point myself, I am nevertheless inclined to the belief, that, in the beginning, he was sincere: for if he were not, what motives could have led him to retire from the busy scenes of active life, which were fast opening before him at home and in which he afterwards took so distinguished a part? Why should he attempt, as unquestionably he *did* attempt; to join the free, the peaceful and the devout colonists of New England; and with *such* associates, to bury all hopes of distinction, all the glittering promises of ambition, in the silent and secluded depths, of *that* wilderness? But his great abilities, *gradually* developed themselves, and became more strongly marked: In the progress of time, and of events, he became more conscious of his own enlarged and grasping capacity: and however sincere in the beginning he may have been; his ardour in the cause of political and religious freedom, gradually merged, in the more absorbing pursuits of his personal ambition. In *any* view of it however, his case furnishes an imposing illustration of the danger of vesting, *unrestricted* and *discretionary* powers, in the hands of a favorite *Party-Leader*, in a popular cause! He commenced his public career, with many professions of patriotism: He succeeded in obtaining the full confidence of his party: as his faculties, by slow degrees acquired fixedness of character, he was esteemed sagacious, and farseeing in council beyond most men; and in the battle-field, he was without a rival. He had some good

qualities: But he died a Despot: he left a story, written in blood! It is fit for us to weigh it well; and to remember, that the warnings of history, can never, *never*, with impunity, be despised!

But it is time this digression were finished: The characters and the purposes of men may sometimes be judged of by those of their associates: It is in that view, I have asked your consideration of these historical data. The Pilgrim Fathers could not be exempt from the ordinary evils, which afflict society. Detraction followed them: Their motives have been impugned; their characters assailed; and derision and silly ridicule, sought to be cast upon them, and upon their descendants. And it has seemed to me that no vindication of their motives, can be more appropriate than such as may be found, in the nature of the government from which they withdrew themselves; the odious persecutions to which that Government subjected them; the rapid and appalling advances it was making towards uncontrolled and arbitrary power; and especially in a full understanding of the moral, intellectual and political qualities and propensities, which distinguished their intimate friends, those, with whom their sympathies and connections were! and it has been to this end, that I have asked your consideration of the condition of things, in the country which they left: and of the *kind* of men, with whom alone all their associations were: for, of the same *genius* of the *same* race, of intellectual, resolute, pious and devoted Patriots and Christians, were the Pilgrim Fathers of New England! But, they were then called "Puritans;" and in much later times, the same term, has been *sneeringly* applied to them; as if it were a term of contempt and reproach; implying ignorance and fanaticism!

Certainly the first settlers of New England, were of that portion of the people of their native country, who were denominated "Puritans." But *who* were intended by that general appellation? In its *origin*, the term was used to designate the Calvinists of Great Britain, in contradistinction to those of the established Church: and they came to be called "Puritans," from their attempting a *purser* form of worship and discipline, than that prescribed by the English Hierarchy. But, in the progress of time, and of events, it *ceased* to be restricted to a mere religious sect; and came to be applied in a far more comprehensive sense. Thus, the learned and accomplished compiler of a

well known standard work; referring to sundry authorities; affirms that "all were "Puritans" in the estimation of King James, who "adhered to the *laws of the land*, in opposition to *his* arbitrary government, though ever so good *Churchmen*. These, were called "*Puritans in the State*;" and those who scrupled the ceremonies, and "adhered to the doctrines of Calvin, were "Church Puritans;" who "though comparatively few, yet, being joined by those of the other "class, became the *majority of the nation*." And Mr. Hume, who, it will be remembered, was not more the advocate of arbitrary power, than he was a scoffer of christianity, sustains the general fact assumed by Doc. Rees. Speaking of the transactions of 1628, he says, "Amidst "the complication of disputes, in which men were then involved, we "may observe that the appellation "puritan" stood for *three* parties; "which though commonly united, were yet actuated by very different "views and motives. These were the *political* Puritans, who *maintained the highest principles of civil liberty*; the puritans in *discipline*, "and the *doctrinal* puritans. In opposition to *all* these, stood the "*Court Party, &c.*" (3. Hume, 390.) On a previous page, and speaking of the occurrences of an antecedent period; he says, "For it is remarkable that this Party, (the Puritans;) made the privileges of the "nation, *as much a part of their religion*, as the *Church Party* did, "the prerogatives of the Crown, &c." (3. Hume, 345.) The *Puritans* then, the amalgamated party, were those who contended for a *broad*er, and a better defined rule of religious and civil liberty: They were precisely such as Pym and Hampden, and Hazeliig and Vane; and a thousand others of those master spirits; of those great and extraordinary men, who, *produced* by the crisis, and *equal* to the crisis, at length, and at the expense no doubt, of many indefensible excesses; prostrated the arbitrary government of the House of Stuart; and planted deep in the public mind, those vigorous principles of manly freedom, which reaching far beyond the temporary Protectorate of Cromwell, occasioned the revolution of 1688; and changed the future destinies of that great People! Such then I repeat, were the "Puritans;" such the companions, of the Pilgrim Fathers; and *such* the objects of their convulsive struggles! But, before *one* ray of brightness, had gilded the horizon of the Patriot at home; while *all* was gloom and darkness, and fearful oppression there, the men of the "Ply-

mouth Rock," had already left the land of their Fathers! *They*, had already gone into distant and inhospitable climes, in search of that peace and freedom, which seemed forever shut out from them at home! It remains for us to see, how far and in what manner, these fugitives from oppression, remained *true* to their declared faith? How far, when securely established, in their wilderness domain, they sought to exhibit a practical demonstration, of the great principles of their avowed creed? When these wanderers found themselves taken to a coast, far distant from their intended destination; when the privations, and the exposures, and the sufferings of a voyage so greatly protracted, had wasted their strength and impaired their health; when the winter storms, and unwonted severities of that icy shore, had overtaken, and threatened to *overwhelm* them; they *bravely* struggled with their destiny and yet retained their trust in God! Their self-possession, and their hopes, did not desert them! But yielding to a necessity which now became imperative; and finding that they *must* look for their habitation *there*; they calmly set about preparing a system of regulations, by which, their young and feeble colony should thence forward be governed.

This system they drew in writing and severally signed, while all yet remained upon their frail Barque. By that instrument, they formed themselves into a "Body-Politic;" and establishing a few organic rules, and anticipating the future necessity for further legislation; bound themselves, in the name of the God they worshipped, "to submit themselves to such laws and officers, as should be judged most subservient to the general good." After the expiration of a few years; when their population, and the number of their Towns, had very considerably increased; it was found *inconvenient* for the *whole* body of the people to meet, for the passing of such laws as were necessary for their protection and comfort: Then by a supplemented compact, they *enlarged* their system, wisely adopting the principle of "Representation." Their first General Assembly, organized upon this principle, was holden in 1639. An increased number of "assistants" elected annually, by the aggregate vote, appears to have constituted their "Council;" and the different Towns, within the limits of the Colony, respectively elected and sent the prescribed number of "Deputies." With characteristic caution, the powers of

ordinary legislation, were limited; and the great principles of public liberty abundantly secured, by a few organic regulations, contained in the new agreement, which they termed appropriately enough, the "*General Fundamentals*" of their system, and it is worthy of regard, that among those "Fundamentals," was found incorporated, the *bold and pregnant declaration* that "no acts, laws nor ordinances, should be imposed upon them, but *such*, as were enacted by the consent of the "body of the Freemen, or their Representatives regularly assembled." Thus, under a government founded solely on a voluntary compact, and *purely republican* in its character; they effected a general peace with the surrounding barbarians; secured the comfort and prosperity of their little colony; and, continuing to increase greatly in population and in power; they enjoyed all the blessings of a wise and free government, during a succession of many years.

In 1691, it was found expedient to gather, under one Colonial Government, the people of *this* Colony, together with all the various and detached colonies, which in the mean time, had grown up at Boston, Salem and elsewhere, in those parts of New England. Then it was, that the name of "the colony of New Plymouth," was merged in that of the venerated appellation of "The Massachusetts Bay." But establishments had been made also, and had grown into importance, in other more remote parts of New England. Influenced by the successful example of their friends of the "Plymouth Rock," multitudes of the *most respected*, because of the most upright and of the most enlightened, of the yeomanry of Great Britain, with many of the most highly educated persons in the Kingdom, availed themselves of every fit opportunity, to escape from the degrading influences of threatened despotism at home; or from its almost equally fatal alternative, those convulsive disorders, which were rapidly hurling upon their country, all the desolating horrors of civil war! They looked with deep interest to the infant establishments of their countrymen in the New World: already identified with them in religious principles, and in their forms of worship; they now resolved to participate with them also, in the anticipated blessings of their free, peaceful and happy institutions of *civil government*! This they fully effected. In 1635, the first settlement in Connecticut was commenced: some two or three years afterwards, a separate establishment was formed at New Haven:

about the same time, the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, was founded ; and *anterior* to that time, settlers had domiciliated themselves within the borders of New Hampshire.

To review the progress of these several colonial establishments, with their multiplied ramifications, through all the trials and vicissitudes, to which they were subjected ; in peace, and in war ; from infancy, until, collectively, they had attained the fullness and the permanance of full grown maturity : to recite the perils of these early adventurers ; their constancy, their courage, their perseverance and especially their characteristic piety, and their devotedness to the cause of *manly*, but well regulated freedom ; all this, falls within the appropriate province of the faithful historian. To analyze, and to examine minutely the various original and admirable institutions, which they established ; and to trace the prospective and extraordinary influences of those primitive institutions upon society, and upon the future character and happiness of their posterity ; *this* is a work for the closet and the study ; and should be reserved perhaps for a more deliberative occasion. To point out a *few* of these institutions ; *briefly* to consider their tendencies ; and to delineate *some* of the consequences which have resulted from them, is all I can at present, aspire to : and important indeed will be the result, if by doing so, I should conciliate towards them, the general attention ; and especially if I should thus, happily excite in *your* hearts gentlemen, a determination to make them the subjects of *your own special research* ; of *your own* more extended and philosophical consideration ! For I feel entirely persuaded, that *nothing*, can more certainly fasten in our hearts, the elevated character, of those extraordinary men, than *such* a study, *so* pursued ! Nothing can so excite our veneration for their far reaching and wonderful sagacity ; and nothing can bring into so bold relief, that expanded benevolence, which, reaching far beyond the narrow cycle of their *own* years upon earth ; looked forward, to the religious character, to the intellectual improvement, and to the enlightened freedom of their posterity, through the revolving periods of all future time ! And, descendants, as you are gentlemen, from the "Pilgrim Fathers ;" and the proper guardians of their posthumous fame, to *whom*, if not to *you*, belongs the merit the honour, the filial duty, of vindicating that fame, and awakening our grateful recognition of the multiplied and priceless

blessings, which, under the Providence of God, *their* labors have conferred upon us ?

If then, in *this* spirit, and with *such* intent, you should be persuaded to explore this whole matter, and look into the ample store of rich blessings, our early ancestors have garnered up for us, your attention will no doubt, be first arrested, by a consideration of that great and leading characteristic of their social organization, the strongly marked religious aspect and tendency of all their settled regulations. *This* constitutes too bold and prominent a feature, to escape the detection of the most careless observer. A strong religious feeling, a deep and chastened sense of responsibility, and of dependence upon God, and a corresponding veneration for his character, pervade *all* their plans, and all their measures : and even in this slight review, I should hold myself highly censurable, if I were to pass over, without notice, *this*, the pervading spirit of the whole ! But *any* discussion on my part, of the relations which exist between man, in his *individual* capacity, and the Creator and Ruler of all things, however immeasurably important these relations may be, to the individual happiness of man ; does not come within the scope I had on this occasion prescribed for myself. *Such* a theme, is for the minister of the gospel : for *him* whose fervid exhortations, and whose untiring and eloquent appeals, you, gentlemen, as *true* sons of New England, are, no doubt, accustomed to listen to, on every Sabbath. Passing by then, but with all becoming reverence, *this* branch of the subject ; my purpose is to solicit your more particular attention, to the influences, which that spirit of piety and devotion, to which I have alluded, is *certainly* calculated to exert upon society ; upon men in their *collective* and aggregate character ; upon nations. The ignorant and the thoughtless, may *sneer* at the eminent piety of the early “ Puritans ;” the *buffoon*, may make it the subject of his coarse and vulgar jest ! But let all such, *point* to the *instance*, if it can be found, either in sacred or profane history ; in which *any* nation has attained to eminence, and *sustained* itself in its elevation and prosperity ; whose people have not been distinguished, by a fervent *piety*, a pervading and deep sense of religious feeling ? “ Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to “ *political* prosperity, religion and morality, are indispensable supports. “ In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should

“labor to *subvert* these great pillars of human happiness ; these firm-  
 “est props of the duties of men, and citizens. The *mere politician*,  
 “equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them.  
 “A *volume* could not trace all their connection, with private and pub-  
 “lic felicity. Let it simply be asked *where* is the security for pro-  
 “perty, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation,  
 “desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in  
 “courts of justice ? And let us, with *caution*, indulge in the supposi-  
 “tion, that *morality* can be maintained, without *religion*. Whatever  
 “may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of  
 “*peculiar structure* ; reason and experience both forbid us to expect,  
 “that *national morality*, can prevail, in exclusion of religious princi-  
 “ples.” Thus spake the man whose memory we all revere. Thus  
 spoke the man, at whose feet, the shafts of contemptuous ridicule,  
 always fell, harmless, and with broken point ! And if the propositions  
 he advances be in themselves true, when applied to *all* forms of hu-  
 man government, how much more manifestly are they true, when  
 applied to a government like *ours*, whose only basis is public opinion ;  
 and whose strength, whose *continuance*, whose *life giving principle*,  
 are, the *virtue*, the *intelligence* of its people !

And here, passing to another topic ; I desire again to refer for a  
 moment, to the paternal injunctions of the same distinguished per-  
 sonage ; of him, who never advised without wisdom ; and who never  
 exhorted, but in the voice of patriotism ! In view of the powerful  
 agency of public opinion, in *all* the operations of *popular governments*,  
 General Washington thus admonishes the people of the United States ;  
 “Promote then, (he says) as an object of primary importance, institu-  
 “tions for the *general diffusion of knowledge*. In proportion as the  
 “structure of a government, gives *force* to public opinion, it is *essential*,  
 “that public opinion should be enlightened !” Let us take pride to  
 ourselves then gentlemen, that our sagacious, but quiet and unobtru-  
 sive ancestors, “the puritan founders” of New England, had, nearly  
 two hundred years before the *Farewell Address* was written ; reduced  
 those speculative, but undoubted truths, into a full and practical de-  
 monstration ! For closely connected with their purpose to infuse, into  
 the minds and hearts of those who should come after them, those  
 principles of piety and religion which so eminently characterised

themselves, was their system of "common schools." Of inferior importance, in their estimation, *only* to their religious establishments; so, *next* in the order of time, *this* subject engrossed their attention. Their plan was *original*; or, if not original with them; it was in New England *only*, that it was first carried into systematic operation; as a distinct and elementary *principle*, of their social and political organization. It was *there*, that its utility was *first* made manifest: it was *there*, that the great moral beauty of the system was *fully* and *practically*, illustrated! But *there*, within the restrictive limits of the country of its origin, was this *primitive*, but most beneficent institution, destined to be confined, for a long, long course of years, unnoticed abroad, without imitation and without acknowledgement.

Isolated in position, having very little connection, anterior to the period of our Revolution, with the inhabitants of the other British Colonies; and very much cut off, from all intercourse with the rest of the world, except through the medium of a direct and limited trade with the mother country; their institutions were but little known, and *therefore*, not justly appreciated. And there, without being made the subject, either of boasting or of noise; amidst the rocky cliffs, and green hills of New England; this system has remained in full operation, bearing the test of a long unbroken experience, scattering its blessings, broad cast, among all classes of people, and growing more in the affection of its countless beneficiaries, every day! But it was not fated, *always* to remain the undivided privilege, of the country of its origin. Thanks to the expanded benevolence, to the characteristic perseverance, to the "*bigotry*" if gentlemen *will* have it so, of the "Puritans" of New England; thanks, a thousand thanks, to the *Danes* and the *Shermans*, of our *Father land*, a scion was taken from *that* stock, and planted in the "Far-West:" and it took root there, and grew! And when the teeming population of the "Plymouth Rock," had spread over the surface of that country, in which its destinies had first been cast; and its superabundant numbers, were seeking *more space*, a finer soil, and a more genial climate, in the primitive Forests of the "Great valley; each carried with him, the habits and the predilections of his fathers: and each, as he arrived in the chosen country of his new habitation, aided *con amore* in the protection, in the growth and in the expansion of the embryo system,

*New England Councils, had happily planted there!* Now, it is deeply imbedded among its most favored organic institutions. Its vigorous shoots, with richer promise for the future; are already beginning to shed abroad, throughout the boundless west, their copious and benignant fruit! nor has it grown, when transplanted, like some exotics, with a penurious and a stunted growth. for, in the *west*, too, it is now basking in the genial warmth, of the public favour! It is fitted indeed, to *any* latitude, to *any* climate: and so, as it preserves its original stamina, and the great outlines of its dimensions, it may be increased even, in its utility, and in its beauty, in the very process of its adaptation, to the varied circumstances of its new location. Thus, *here*, in our own new state, a state, as it were of yesterday, provision is made in the organic Law, not only for its establishment, upon a comprehensive and well adjusted plan, but, as auxiliary to its great purpose, it is also ordained, that there shall be established, in each Township of the State, at least *one public library*. The advantages of a universal and irrevocable provision, in the *fundamental law*, for an object like this, over *any*, which voluntary contribution, or local and conventional agreements in the several Townships, can furnish, are obvious: But, at the outset, an embarrassing difficulty presented itself, which seemed to leave but little ground for hope, that the measure would succeed: and although a relation of the incidents that occurred, may seem out of place here, I hope I may be pardoned for alluding to them. It will be conceded that a *barren enactment*, that such public libraries should be established; without indicating any means, either to *procure* or to *sustain* them, would have been but idle mockery: But, the state had *no* means: It was just then coming into existence: It had *no* existing fund, which could be made available, for *such* a purpose: It had none, which could *promise* to be productive for a long and indefinite period; not, probably, until after the existing population, should all "have been gathered to their fathers!" It was *then*, that the original thought occurred to one of the members of the convention, himself a descendant of the Puritans; to meet the obstacle, by constituting, of all the sums assessed for the non-performance of militia service; and of the pecuniary products of *all fines* imposed for the violation of the penal law, *throughout the State*, and *for all future time*; a fund, to be made exclusively applicable to that beneficent purpose! Thus converting the

very *crimes* of the citizen, into a means of ameliorating the heart of the student; and his refusal to appear on the gaudy parade, "armed and equipped according to law," into a means, "of diffusing useful knowledge among men!" and so it is ordained, in the Constitution of Michigan. There may be something *whimsical* in the strange commixture of ideas, which the project implies, but it is characteristic of its origin; and like all genuine "Yankee Notions," it has much of the *practically useful* in it. It saved and rendered effectual, the constitutional provision for the establishment of public libraries; and if these monies be faithfully collected and paid over; and the fund be administered with discretion and fidelity, it will constitute, in a short period, and judging of the future by the past; a rich and productive endowment. It gives me pleasure, to bear thus my individual testimony, in favor of the bold projector of this peculiar, but most useful improvement, upon the general plan.\* (See Art. 10. Sec. 3 and 4. Cons. of Michigan.)

But, dwelling no longer upon these details; it is appropriate to remark, that the whole subject of common schools, and the diffusion of useful knowledge among men, seems recently to have engrossed, in a very great degree, the public attention. Men of a high order of talents among us, have made it the subject of much philosophical research, and loudly proclaimed its importance: Patriots too, who discover in "the *signs of the times*," harbingers, of evil omen; are looking with intense interest, to the influences, *remote* perhaps, but in *their* view, certain, which this system of common schools is exerting, as their last, but sure ground of hope; for the preservation *in its purity*, of our free and popular government. Nor is the pride of ancient Europe, offended at the thoughts of borrowing from the New World, a system which has worked so well here! It is in full and successful operation, especially in the northern parts of Germany. And common schools, and other means of "diffusing useful knowledge among men," have been the topics of the most philosophical and eloquent disquisitions of the British press! All this, is as it should be: But the wonder is, that an operative principle, so prolific of results, and of

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\* Edward D. Ellis Esq, then of Monroe, was a member of the Convention, and when this subject was under discussion, and on the spur of the occasion he proposed this method of obtaining the requisite means for establishing and maintaining the Township Libraries.

so priceless value, should have remained so long unnoticed and unknown, except within the limited region of its direct and benignant influences! It is no centennial plant, that bestows its product, and displays its splendid beauties to the sun, but *once* only, in a hundred years: It is rather some active and perennial power, and as all may see; of *instant, continued and unceasing fruitfulness!* A power which, pervading the masses of Society, seeks indiscriminately, the recipients of its bounty, in the *humble* walks of life, and among the indigent, as well as the opulent; which teaches, to all, alike, the great moral and social duties of man! A power, which sends its genial influences, in *equal measure*, to the heart, and to the understanding of the poor and of the wealthy; and gives form and strength and expansion, to the moral and to the intellectual faculties, of *all* those, who, in due succession, *must* participate, more or less largely, in the administration of their common government; and into whose custody, for the time being, the destinies of this beautiful country of ours, *must* be committed!

And this system, so simple in its design, so beneficent in its purposes and in its effects; so perfectly harmonizing with all the free institutions of our country, was the work, gentlemen, of *our* "Pu itan" ancestors! Neither the military schools for the magnates of the Empire of Cyrus; nor the Gymnasias of ancient Greece, nor the philosophic disquisitions of Locke nor of Milton; nor even the wild dreaming of Jean Jacques Rousseau, could furnish its prototype. It was an original conception in the minds of our "Puritan" fathers: It was interwoven in the very texture of their Governments. It was indigenous, alone, to the soil of New England! Pa don me gentlemen, for detaining you so long, on a topic, so common-place—perhaps, so trite: I have sought to press upon your remembrance, the pregnant facts I have asserted; lest at any time it should be forgotten, that this priceless jewel, was an emanation from the "Plymouth Rock!"

Col. Benton sometimes, pleasantly enough, charges his brothers of the Senate, with "stealing his thunder!" But "let honor be rendered to whom honor is due:" let no man rob from the dead! Let no man wrest from the brow of *our* ancestry, "Puritans" though they were; the honor of devising a plan, which, of itself, should have secured to their memory, a high place, among the most distinguished of the Benefactors of mankind.

It has long ago been said of our fathers, gentlemen, not only that "they were a church-going people," but also, that they were "a law abiding people!" Both propositions, and greatly to their honor, are abundantly true. No people on earth, were ever more scrupulously exact in conforming themselves, in all things, to the *letter of the law*, than they were: and none more obedient, in all things lawful, to the orders of those in authority! And this for the very sound and natural reason, that *they* were themselves, always, *the makers of the law*; and those in authority, derived all their powers from the same source, the *aggregate will of all*. I have endeavored, gentlemen, at least on *this* occasion, to bring myself within the spirit of the latter of these admirable characteristics. The constituted authorities of your Society, have signified to me, that it is their pleasure, that I should read before you, a written address. I am a son of New England. How could I oppose myself, to an order, emanating from *such* a source? I could not: and hence it is, that I undertook to group together, such comments upon the history, the character and the institutions of our "Pilgrim Fathers," as might seem appropriate to the occasion. Especially, it was my desire to vindicate the character and the motives of our ancestors: and exhibit a slight, but a symmetrical view, of their principal institutions, political, as well as social: to follow them over the broad country into which they have been transplanted, to trace their prospective influences upon the character and condition of their posterity: or, at all events to indicate—so far as I might be enabled to do so; such topics, and such a course of investigation, as might seem entirely worthy of your further and more deliberate individual researches. But as I approach the labor, it increases and expands before me! Subjects, all worthy of careful analysis, and of the most earnest consideration, multiply, almost without end. And now, that I have barely "penetrated through the bark" of this complicated and fruitful theme, I find it necessary to close: having already occupied as much of your indulgent attention, as the proprieties of the occasion seem to permit.

A review of these topics—especially of their canons of descent, their abolition of the law of primogeniture, and the consequent more equal distribution, among all the citizens, of the landed estate of the country: the political sub-division of the state into townships; the

establishment in each, of a government, for all local purposes, purely democratic, and which, as a preparatory school, fits all alike, for the proper performance of the higher duties of government, might each furnish the subject of a treatise : a glance at these, and at the wonderful harmony which they exhibit ; and their admirable fitness for for the exercise, and the enjoyment of the high privileges of a free, well regulated and a well balanced government, must be reserved, for some future occasion : and probably for some more able expositor. Commending all these topics, gentlemen, to your future and earnest attention, and thanking you for your indulgent attention, I will no longer impose myself upon your exhausted patience.



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